

WSDOT Aviation Monthly Report March 2004

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1. WSDOT Aviation Announces \$1.035 Million in Airport Aid Grants

WSDOT Aviation is pleased to announce that 27 Washington airports will receive a total of \$1.035 million dollars in Airport Aid Grants, representing 38 different construction projects.

- Over 85% of the grants are directed towards pavement preservation projects.
- Full-length runway overlays are planned for 3 of the 8 airports that were identified as “threatened” last year.
- Two of the 6 airports that were identified as “at risk” last year will receive overlays.
- Ninety percent of WSDOT grant dollars are focused at smaller airports that are not eligible for federal funding.
- WSDOT successfully leveraged federal dollars, using \$127,000 to match over \$4 million in FAA grants, offered to Washington airports on the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS).

WSDOT’s Airport Aid Grant Program is funded through aviation fuel tax and state aircraft and airman registration fees. The 3-cent increase on aviation fuel, along with the

\$7.00 registration increase in July 2003 has generated enough money for the Airport Aid Grant Program to justify a third round of grant awards in Spring 2005. WSDOT Aviation will keep airport sponsors posted on information regarding application deadlines and project eligibility. WSDOT thanks registered pilots, mechanics and aircraft owners for helping to protect and preserve the future of Washington's aviation system.

For more information on the 2004 Airport Aid Grant recipients and projects, please see [2004 Airport Grant Awards](#).

2. State Airports Open Early

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is pleased to announce the early opening of seven state-owned airports. Each strip was inspected by Jim Scott, WSDOT Aviation State Airport Maintenance Supervisor, and given the go-ahead for use. Airports that are now open include:

- **Methow Valley State** – five miles south of Winthrop
- **Woodland State** – between Kelso and Vancouver
- **Rogersburg State** – southeast Washington
- **Lower Monumental State** - five miles south of Kahlottus
- **Little Goose State** - ten miles northeast of Starbuck
- **Lower Granite State** - 14 miles south of Colfax
- **Copalis Beach State** - located at the mouth of the Copalis River



Lower Granite State Airport provides an excellent opportunity for fishing, camping, and educational tours through the dam.

“With improved maintenance and the help of many volunteers that participate in the Adopt-an-Airport program, we will continue to open state airports earlier in spring and close them later in fall, as the snow season permits,” Scott said.

WSDOT reminds pilots to perform an over-flight and check Notices to Airmen (NOTAMS) and weather conditions before using any of the state-owned strips.

All those visiting state-owned airports are encouraged to send comments, suggestions, stories, and pictures to Jim Scott at ScottJ@wsdot.wa.gov

3. Annual Legislative Conference Proves Productive for State Aviation Officials

Every year, the National Association of State Aviation Officials (NASAO) gathers in Washington D.C. to discuss national aviation policy issues with leaders from Congress and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). John Sibold, WSDOT Director of Aviation, attended this year's event, along with 30 other Aviation Directors, to address concerns over proposed budget cuts in aviation funding with Congressional staff.

Partly through NASAO lobbying efforts in 2003, Congress authorized Vision 100, a four-year aviation bill that provides funding for the FAA and the national aviation system, consistent with NASAO's objectives. However, the President's proposed budget for fiscal year 2005 dramatically cuts funding for the FAA's Facilities and Equipments (F&E) budget, which pays for improvements to the nation's air traffic system. In addition, the President cut the Essential Air Service Program (EAS) by \$50 million, which could result in the suspension of air service to many small communities.

Such concerns prompted NASAO members to prepare a national legislative agenda for fiscal year 2004 that focuses attention on several key appropriations issues including:

- Reinstatement of EAS funding until a commission is formed to re-evaluate the program,
- Reinstatement of F&E funding, and
- Adequate funding for the Joint Planning and Development Office tasked to develop a comprehensive aviation plan for the future.

NASAO focused specifically on the appropriations of \$250,000 for the EAS Commission to fix the program, which is aligned with the efforts of Northwest Aviation Directors to develop a regional air service plan for small communities at risk of losing service.

Sibold spoke with Congressional staff representing Senator Murray, Senator Cantwell, Rep. Inslee, Rep. Dicks, Rep. Baird, Rep. Hastings, and Rep. Larsen. Senator Murray, in particular, indicated her intent to make sure cuts do not occur in the F&E budget.

Though aviation is targeted for Federal Budget cuts, the Airport Improvement Budget, which funds both large and small commercial airport improvements, will remain intact.

4. FAA to Fund Temporary Tower During Arlington Fly-In. Despite increasing pressure to cut its Facility and Equipment Budget, the FAA agreed to fund a temporary tower during the Arlington Fly-In. As the third largest in the country, the Arlington Fly-In creates significant economic activity for the community during one week each summer. This year's event will take place July 7-11 at the Arlington Airport.

5. Small Community Air Service Grant Program generates interest in the NW. Northwest Aviation Directors, community airport sponsors, and representatives from the U.S. Department of Transportation met in March to discuss the air service grants offered through DOT for 2004. During the meeting, sponsored by WSDOT Aviation, attendees obtained an overview of the grant program's history and purpose along with application guidelines, selection criteria, reimbursement procedures, and certain airline and local contribution issues.

In 2000, the President signed AIR-21, which established a new program designed to help smaller communities enhance their air service. Specifically, the law authorizes the Secretary of Transportation to provide financial assistance to as many as 40 communities nationwide for each year in which program funds are appropriated, though no more than

four communities can be from the same state. For fiscal year 2004, Congress appropriated \$20 million for the program.

Applications must be submitted by May 14 and grants will be awarded by September 30. Partnering with Oregon, Idaho, and Montana WSDOT Aviation will apply for a grant to develop a community air service plan for the Northwest Region.

6. Missing Aircraft Located at the Bottom of Case Inlet. On March 16, a 1948 Cessna 170 aircraft, missing since Feb. 29th with David Verstrate (65) and Harold Bennett (59) on board, was positively identified at the bottom of Case Inlet with the bodies inside, according to Ed Troyer from the Pierce County Sheriff's Office.

WSDOT Aviation transferred the recovery effort to the Pierce County Sheriff's Department after 15 days of searching for the aircraft, which is standard procedure once the air search locates a missing plane.

At 11:30 a.m. on March 17, members of the Pierce County Sheriff's Department Marine Services Unit and Dive Team along with Underwater Admiralty Services recovered the bodies, according to Troyer.

WSDOT's search effort covered the air, ground and water and included over 200 volunteers, 70 volunteer aircraft, 48 vehicles and over 200 sorties. WSDOT also received assistance from Pierce, Mason, Thurston, King, and Snohomish Counties, as well as from the Coast Guard, Washington Air Search and Rescue (WASAR), Civil Air Patrol, Air Force, and Washington Air National Guard.

7. Arlington Considered as Possible NASCAR Site. John Sibold, WSDOT Aviation Director, got together with local officials to discuss the impact of a proposed NASCAR racetrack near the Arlington Airport. Many of the NASCAR sites are proposed within several miles of the airport, raising issues such as potential closure of airspace during race events, large public gatherings in airport safety areas, and wildlife attractants from newly created storm water retention. Discussions remain in the preliminary stages, but WSDOT Aviation has already expressed to State Senator Sheldon its concerns and primary interest to protect the state's aviation system.



8. WSDOT Aviation Comments on Hazardous Wildlife Attractants Near Airports. WSDOT Aviation commented on a Draft Advisory Circular, released by the FAA, which addresses the dangers of creating wildlife attractants near airports. Wildlife strikes, primarily bird strikes, remain the second leading cause of aviation-related fatalities. While these strikes are not frequent in relation to the millions of annual aircraft

operations, the potential for catastrophic loss of human life resulting from one incident is substantial. It is estimated that 75 percent of all civil aviation air strikes occur near airports. Approximately 97 percent of aircraft wildlife strikes involve common, large-bodied birds or large flocks of small birds. Almost 70 percent of these events involve gulls, waterfowl, and raptors. The FAA estimates that between 1990 and 1999, civilian U.S. aircraft sustained \$4 billion worth of damage and associated losses and 4.7 million hours of aircraft downtime due to wildlife strikes. The state House of Representatives refused to pass an environmental bill this year, designed to align state law with FAA recommendations regarding safe aircraft operations. Discussions will continue this spring between WSDOT Aviation and the State Ecology and Fish and Wildlife Departments.